

TRIAL OF FAITH.

Beautiful Lesson in the Story of Abraham and His Son Isaac.

A Faith That Survived the Trial—Abraham's Deliverance From a Great Burden—Sermon by Rev. Dr. T. DeWitt Talmage, D. D.

In his sermon for Sunday, Rev. Dr. Talmage chose for his subject Abraham's supreme trial of faith and the angelic rescue of Isaac from being offered by his father as a sacrifice. The text was Gen. xxii. 7: "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?"

Here are Abraham and Isaac; the one a kind, old, gracious, affectionate father; the other a brave, obedient, religious son. From his bronzed appearance you can tell that this son has been much in the fields, and from his shaggy dress you know that he has been watching the herds. The mountain air has painted his cheek rufous. He is 20, 25, or, as some suppose, 33 years of age; nevertheless a boy, considering the length of life to which people lived in those times, and the fact that a son never is anything but a boy to a father. I remember that my father used to come into the house when the children were home on some festive occasion, and say: "Where are the boys?" although the boys were 25, and 30 and 35 years of age. So this Isaac is only a boy to Abraham, and this father's heart is in him. It is Isaac here and Isaac there. If there is any festivity around the father's tent, Isaac must enjoy it. It is Isaac's walk, and Isaac's apparel, and Isaac's manners, and Isaac's prospects, and Isaac's prosperity. The father's heart strings are all wrapped around that boy, and wrapped again, until nine-tenths of the old man's life is in Isaac. I can just imagine how lovingly and proudly he looked at his only son.

Well, the dear old man has borne a great deal of trouble, and it had left its mark upon him. In hieroglyphics of wrinkle the story was written from forehead to chin, but now his trouble seems all gone, and we are glad that he is very soon to rest forever. If the old man shall get decrepit, Isaac is strong enough to wait on him. If the father gets dim of eyesight, Isaac will lead him by the hand. If the father becomes destitute, Isaac will earn him bread. How glad we are that the ship that has been in such a stormy sea is coming at last into the harbor. "Are you not rejoiced that glorious old Abraham is through with his troubles? No! no! A thunderbolt! From that clear eastern sky there drops into that father's tent a voice with an announcement enough to turn black hair white, and to stun the patriarch into instant annihilation. God said: 'Abraham!' The old man answered, 'Here I am.' God said to him: 'Take thy son, thy only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering.' In other words, slay him; cut his body into fragments; put the fragments on the wood; set fire to the wood, and let Isaac's body be consumed to ashes.

"Cannibalism! Murder!" says some one. "Not so," said Abraham. I hear him soliloquize: "Here is the boy on whom I have depended! Oh, how I loved him! He was given in answer to prayer and now must I surrender him? O Isaac, my son! Isaac, how shall I part with you? But, then, it is always safer to do as God asks me to; I have been in dark places before and God got me out. I will implicitly do as God told me, although it is very dark. I can't see my way, but I know God makes no mistakes, and to Him I commit myself and my darling son."

Early in the morning there is a stir around Abraham's tent. A beast of burden is fed and saddled. Abraham makes no disclosure of the awful secret. At the break of day he says: "Come, come, Isaac, get up! We are going off on a two or three days' journey." I hear the ax hewing and splitting amid the wood until the sticks are made the right length and the right thickness, and then they are fastened on the beast of burden. They pass on—there are four of them—Abraham, the father; Isaac, the son, and two servants. Going along the road, I see Isaac looking up into his father's face and saying: "Father, what is the matter? Are you not well? Has anything happened? Are you tired? Lean on my arm." Then, turning around to the servants, the son says: "Ah! father is getting old, and he has had trouble enough in other days to kill him."

The third morning has come, and it is the day of the tragedy. The two servants are left with the beast of burden, while Abraham and his son Isaac, as was the custom of good people in those times, went up on the hill to sacrifice to the Lord. The wood is taken off the beast's back and put on Isaac's back. Abraham has in one hand a pan of coals or a lamp, and in the other a sharp, keen knife. Here are all the appliances for sacrifice, you say. No, there is one thing wanting. There is no victim—no pigeon, or heifer, or lamb. Isaac, not knowing that he is to be the victim, looks up into his father's face, and asks a question which must have cut the old man to the bone: "My father!" The father said: "My son, Isaac, here I am!" The son said: "Behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb?" The father's lips quivered, and his heart

fainted, and his knees knocked together, and his entire body, mind and soul shivered in sickening anguish as he struggles to gain equipoise; for he does not want to break down. And then he looks into his son's face, with a thousand rushing tenderness, and says: "My son, God will provide himself a lamb."

The twins are now at the foot of the hill, the place which is to be famous for a most transcendent occurrence. They gather some stones out of the field and build an altar three or four feet high. Then they take this wood off Isaac's back and sprinkle it over the stones, so as to help and invite the flames.

The altar is done—it is all done. Isaac has helped to build it. With his father he has discussed whether the top of the table is even, and whether the wood is properly prepared. Then there is a pause. The son looks around to see if there is not some living animal that can be caught and butchered for the offering. Abraham tries to choke down his fatherly feelings and suppress his grief in order that he may break the terrific news to his son that he is to be the victim.

Ah! Isaac never looked more beautiful than on that day to his father. As the old man ran his emaciated fingers through his son's hair he said to himself: "How shall I give him up? What will his mother say when I come back without my boy? I thought he would have been the comfort of my declining days. I thought he would have been the hope of ages to come. Beautiful and loving, and yet to die under my own hand. Oh, God! is there not some other sacrifice that will do? Take my life, and spare his! Pour out my blood, and save Isaac for his mother and the world!" But this was an inward struggle. The father controls his feelings, and looks into his son's face, and says: "Isaac, must I tell you all?" "Yes, father, I thought you had something on your mind; tell it." The father said: "My son, Isaac, thou art a lamb!" "Oh," you say, "why didn't that young man, if he was twenty or thirty years of age, smite into the dust his infirm father? He could have done it." Ah! Isaac knew by this time that the scene was typical of a Messiah who was to come, and so he made no struggle. They fell on each other's necks and wailed out the parting. Awful and matchless scene of the wilderness. The rocks echo back the breaking of their hearts. The cry: "My son! my son!" The answer: "My father! my father!"

Do not compare this, as some people have, to Agamemnon, willing to offer up his daughter, Iphigenia, to please the gods. There is nothing comparable to this wonderful obedience to the true God. You know that victims for sacrifice were always bound, so that they might not struggle away. Rawlings, the martyr, when he was dying for Christ's sake, said to the blacksmith who held the manacles: "Fasten those chains tight now, for my flesh may struggle mightily." So Isaac's arms are fastened, his feet are tied. The old man, rallying all his strength, lifts him on to a pile of wood. Fastening a thong on one side of the altar, he makes it span the body of Isaac, and fastens the thong at the other side the altar, and another thong, and another thong. There is the lamp flickering in the wind, ready to be put under the brush-wood of the altar. There is the knife, sharp and keen. Abraham—struggling with his mortal feelings on the one side, and the commands of God on the other—takes that knife, rubs the flat of it on the palm of his hand, cries to God for help, comes up to the side of the altar, puts a parting kiss on the brow of his boy, takes a message from him for mother and home, and then, lifting the glittering weapon for the plunge of the death stroke—his muscles knitting for the work—the hand begins to descend. It falls! Not on the heart of Isaac but on the arm of God, who arrests the stroke, making the wilderness quake with the cry: "Abraham! Abraham! lay not thy hand upon the lad, nor do him any harm!" What is this sound back in the woods? It is a crackling as of tree branches, a bleating and a struggle. Go, Abraham, and see what it is. Oh, it was a ram that, going through the woods, has its crooked horns fastened and entangled in the brushwood, and could not get loose; and Abraham seizes it gladly, and quickly unloosens Isaac from the altar, puts the ram on in his place, sets the lamp under the brushwood of the altar, and as the dense smoke of the sacrifice begins to rise, the blood rolls down the sides of the altar, and drops hissing into the fire, and I hear the words: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world."

"Well, what are you going to get out of this? There is an aged minister of the Gospel. He says: 'I should get out of it that when God tells you to do a thing, whether it seems reasonable to you or not, go ahead and do it. Here Abraham couldn't have been mistaken. God didn't speak so distinctly that it was not certain whether he called Sarah, or Abimelech, or somebody else; but with Divine articulation, Divine intonation, Divine emphasis, he said: 'Abraham!' Abraham rushed blindly ahead to do his duty, knowing that things would come out right. Likewise do so yourselves. There is a mystery of your life. There is some burden you have to carry. You don't know why God has put it on you. There is some persecution, some trial, and you don't know why God allows it. There is a

work for you to do, and you have not enough grace, you think, to do it. Do as Abraham did. Advance, and do your whole duty. Be willing to give up Isaac, and perhaps you will have to give up anything. 'Jehovah-jireh—the Lord will provide'—A capital lesson this old minister gives us."

Out yonder, in this house, is an aged woman; the light of Heaven in her face; she is half-way through the door, she has her hand on the pearl of the gate. Mother, what would you get out of this subject? "Oh," she says, "I would learn that it is in the last pinch that God comes to the relief. You see the altar was ready, and Isaac was fastened on it, and the knife was lifted, and just at the last moment God broke in and stopped proceedings. So it has been in my life of 70 years. Why, sir, there was a time when the floor was all out of the house; and I set the table at noon and had nothing to put on it; but five minutes of 1 o'clock a loaf of bread came. The Lord will provide. My son was very sick and I said: 'Dear Lord, you don't mean to take him away from me, do you?' Please, Lord, don't take him away. Why, there are neighbors who have three and four sons; this is my only son; this is my Isaac. Lord, you won't take him away from me, will you? But I saw he was getting worse and worse all the time; and I turned round and prayed, until after a while I felt submissive, and I could say: 'Thy will, O Lord, be done!' The doctors gave him up. And, as was the custom in those times, we had made the grave clothes, and we were whispering about the last exercises, when I looked, and I saw some perspiration on his brow, showing that the fever had broken, and he spoke to us so naturally, that I knew he was going to get well. He did get well, and my son Isaac whom I thought was going to be slain and consumed of disease, was loosened from that altar. And bless your souls, that's been so for seventy years, and if my voice were not so weak, and if I could see better, I could preach to you younger people a sermon; for though I can't see much, I can see this: Whenever you get into a tough place and your heart is breaking if you will look a little further into the woods, you will see, caught in the branches, a substitute and a deliverance. 'My son, God will provide Himself a lamb.'"

Thank you, mother, for that short sermon. I could preach back to you for a minute or two and say, never do you fear. I wish I had half as good a hope of Heaven as you have. Do not fear, mother; whatever happens, no harm will ever happen to you. I was going up a long flight of stairs, and I saw an aged woman, very decrepit, and with a cane, creeping on up. She made but very little progress, and I felt very exuberant, and I said to her: "Why, mother, that is no way to go up stairs," and I threw my arms around her and I carried her up and put her down on the landing at the top of the stairs. She said: "Thank you, thank you; I am very thankful." O mother, when you get through this life's work and you want to go upstairs and rest in the good place that God has provided for you, and will not have to climb up—you will not have to crawl up painfully. The two arms that were stretched on the cross will be flung around you, and you will be hoisted with a glorious lift beyond all weariness and all struggle. May the God of Abraham and Isaac be with you until you see the Lamb on the hilltop.

Now, that aged minister has made a suggestion, and this aged woman has made a suggestion: I will make a suggestion: Isaac going up the hill makes me think of the great sacrifice. Isaac, the only son of Abraham. Jesus, the only son of God. On those two "onlys" I build a fearful emphasis. O Isaac! O Jesus! But this last sacrifice was a more tremendous one. When the knife was lifted over Calvary there was no voice that cried "Stop!" and no hand arrested it. Sharp, keen and tremendous, it cut down through nerve and artery until the blood sprayed the faces of the executioners, and the midday had dropped a veil of cloud over its face because it could not endure the spectacle. O Isaac of Mt. Moriah! O Jesus of Mt. Calvary! Better could God have thrown away into annihilation a thousand worlds than to have sacrificed His only Son. It was not one of ten sons—it was His only Son. If He had not given up Him you and I would have perished. "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Great God! break my heart at the thought of that sacrifice. Isaac the only, typical of Jesus the only.

You see Isaac going up the hill and carrying the wood. O Abraham, why not take the load off the boy? If he is going to die so soon, why not make his last hours easy? Abraham knew that in carrying that wood up Mt. Moriah Isaac was to be a symbol of Christ carrying his own cross up Calvary. I do not know how heavy that cross was—whether it was made of oak, or acacia, or Lebanon cedar. I suppose it may have weighed one, or two, or three hundred pounds. That was the lightest part of the burden. All the sins and sorrows of the world were wound around

that cross. The heft of one, the heft of two, worlds, earth and hell were on his shoulders. Oh, Isaac, carrying the wood of sacrifice up Mount Moriah. Oh, Jesus, carrying the wood of sacrifice up Mount Calvary, the agonies of earth and hell wrapped around that cross. I shall never see the heavy load on Isaac's back, that I shall not think of the crushing load on Christ's back. For whom that load? For you. For you. For me. For me. Would that all the tears that we have ever wept over our sorrows had been saved until this morning, and that we might now pour them out on the lacerated back and feet and heart of the Son of God. You say: "If this young man was 20 or 30 years of age did not he resist? Why was it not Isaac binding Abraham instead of Abraham binding Isaac? The muscle in Isaac's arm was stronger than the muscle in Abraham's withered arm. No young man 25 years of age would submit to have his father fasten him to a pile of wood with the intention of burning." Isaac was a willing sacrifice, and so a type of Christ who willingly came to save the world. If all the armies of Heaven had resolved to force Christ out from the gate, they could not have done it. Christ was equal with God. If all the battalions of glory had armed themselves and resolved to put Christ forth and make him come out and save this world, they could not have succeeded in it. With one stroke He would have toppled over angelic and archangelic dominion.

But there was one thing that the omnipotent Christ could not stand. Our sorrows mastered Him. He could not bear to see the world die without an offer of pardon and help, and if all Heaven had armed itself to keep Him back, if the gates of life had been bolted and double-barred, Christ would have flung the everlasting doors from their hinges, and would have sprung forth scattering the hindering hosts of Heaven like chaff before the whirlwind, as He cried: "Lo! I have come to suffer! Lo! I come to die!" Christ—a willing sacrifice. Willing to take Bethlehem humiliation, and Sanhedrim outrage, and whipping-post maltreatment, and Golgotha butchery. Willing to be bound. Willing to suffer. Willing to die. Willing to save. How does this affect you?

Do not your very best impulses bound out toward this pain-struck Christ? Get down at his feet, O ye people! Put your lips against the wound on his right foot and help kiss away the pang. Wipe the foam from His dying lips. Get under the cross until you feel the baptism of His rushing tears. Take Him into your heart, with warmest love and undying enthusiasm. By your resistance you have abused Him long enough. Christ is willing to save you. Are you willing to be saved? It seems to me as if this moment were throbbing with the invitations of an all-compassionate God.

I have been told that the Cathedral of St. Mark stands in a quarter in the center of the city of Venice, and that when the clock strikes twelve at noon all the birds from the city and the regions around about the city fly to the square and settle down. It came in this wise: A large-hearted woman passing one noonday across the square, saw some birds hovering in the cold, and she scattered some crumbs of bread among them. The next day, at the same hour, she scattered more crumbs of bread among them, and so on from year to year until the day of her death. In her will she bequeathed a certain amount of money to keep up the same practice, and now, at the first stroke of the bell at noon, the birds begin to come there, and when the clock has struck 12 the square is covered with them. How beautifully suggestive. Christ comes out to feed thy soul to-day. The more hungry you feel yourselves to be, the better it is. It is noon and the Gospel clock strikes 12. Come in flocks! Come as doves to the window! All the air is filled with the liquid chime: Come! Come! Come!

Gutta-Percha by a New Method.

It has heretofore been the practice of collectors of gutta-percha to cut down the trees to get at the gum. It has been discovered that plucking the leaves and extracting the gum from them is not only more profitable as to immediate results, but does away with the danger of exterminating the plant. The gum obtained from the leaves is purer, easier to manage and more abundant than that gathered by cutting the tree. It has been found that two pluckings of the leaves yield as much gum as a tree of twenty-five years' growth. Some concern has been expressed as to the possible failure of the supply, on account of the destruction of these forests, but this new discovery will not only make the crop easier to gather, but will increase the supply, bring down the price and permit of a much wider range of uses than heretofore.—N. Y. Ledger.

A SOUTH NORWALK (CT.) tailor recently made a wager of \$5 that he could eat 150 raw tomatoes. The day set for the contest came, and one by one the red beauties disappeared, until his capacious stomach held the 150 tomatoes.

MARTIN BROWN attended service Sunday evening at the German Catholic church, Chicago. He fell asleep and snored so loudly the sexton, Michael Klitch, had him arrested for disorderly conduct. He was fined \$10.

PERSONAL AND IMPERSONAL.

—W. S. Stratton, the Indiana carpenter who went to Cripple Creek and is now fast becoming a millionaire, was at one time after he reached there in the greatest destitution and is said to have offered Senator Walcott a half interest in his mine for three hundred dollars. Stratton is as plain and democratic a man as he was before he "struck it rich."

—"To the last," says London Figaro, "the duke of Cambridge clung to the idea that he would be continued in his office by the new government, and it is understood that when he received the news at Homburg of his definite supersession by Lord Wolseley he was deeply chagrined. His friends do not hesitate to say his enforced retirement will hasten his end."

—Prof. Heim, a Swiss savant at the Alpine club in Zurich, declares that one of "the most convenient, elegant and agreeable" of all manners of death is that which follows a fall from some Alpine height. There is neither physical nor moral suffering in Prof. Heim's opinion, in being hurled through space; only a "delicious fine taste of the celestial beatitudes."

—One of the notoriety of Paris is anquet, who was official coachman of Napoleon III. during all his imperial career. After the latter's downfall Linquet became driver of the hearse for the great burial company of Paris. He recently officiated in that capacity for President Carnot, and had previously presided at the funerals of Thiers, Victor Hugo and Gambetta.

—Lord Verulam, who died recently at eighty-six, was the last survivor of the first Winchester and Harrow elevens, which met in 1825, seventy years to a day before the earl's death. The Winchester captain was Christopher Wordsworth, afterward bishop of Lincoln; the captain of Harrow was Charles Wordsworth, later bishop of St. Andrews, and on his eleven was Cardinal Manning, who was caught out by the bishop of Lincoln for a goose egg.

—The bicycle has not yet penetrated to Lincoln county, Wash., but when it does the maidens of that region will probably make some records that will cause some of the girls in the east who are publicly priding themselves on their stamina and vigor to sing more softly of their achievements. One girl living at a remote settlement there wanted badly to attend the Fourth of July ball, held at the town of Newport, forty-six miles away, but could not be spared for more than the one day. This was all she wanted, however, and she rode on horseback the forty-six miles to the ball on the afternoon of the Fourth, danced all through the night, and left the ball room only to remount her horse and ride back the forty-six miles home, arriving there in good season on the 5th.

"A LITTLE NONSENSE."

—It is hard to please the man who never knows what he wants.—Ram's Horn.

—Always at Hand.—Husband (rumaging through a drawer): "Well, it's very strange; I can never find anything." Wife—"You can always find fault, it seems to me."—Detroit Free Press.

—Anxious Inquirer (to crusty old gentleman): "When do you suppose this rain is going to stop?" Crusty Old Gentleman—"When it gets to the ground, of course."—South Boston News.

"I wonder," said Tommy, who had been reading the poem about the Arab who refused a purse of gold for his steed, "I wonder what he would have did if they had offered to trade him a bicycle."—Indianapolis Journal.

—Mrs. McSwat—"The reason I object to your spending so much time at that club of yours, Billinger, is that I am sure it is nothing but a resort of loafers." Mr. McSwat—"Great Scott, Maria! What's any club?"—Chicago Tribune.

—"The meanest man I know of," he said, reflectively, "is in politics. He doesn't know what honor is." "What did he do?" asked the listener. "He bought votes on credit, and after the delivery of the goods repudiated the obligation."—Chicago Post.

—State Abbreviations.—The most egotistical of the United States, "Me."; most religious, "Mass."; most Asiatic, "Ind."; father of states, "Pa."; most maidenly, "Miss."; best in time of flood, "Ark."; most useful in haying time, "Mo."; decimal state, "Tenn."; state of exclamation, "La."; most astonishing state, "O."; most unhealthy state, "Ill."; state to cure the sick, "Md."; state for students, "Conn."; state where there is no such word as fail, "Kan."; not a state for the untidy, "Wash."—Youth's Companion.

—"Give me a ticket to Helephant," a florid English gentleman is reported to have said to one of the busy clerks at the union station, St. Louis. The clerk looked puzzled for a moment, and then said, "Are you sure you want to go to Helephant? I don't know of any such place on our line." Awe, man, dost thou think I'm a blooming fool. I want to go to Hontaria, and they sed I must go to Helephant and Niagry Falls." "We could send you by way of Buffalo," said the impatient clerk. "Awe, blast me eyes, Buffalo! That's the cursed place. I knew it was some kind of a blasted animal. Give me a ticket to Buffalo, not to Helephant."—St. Louis Republic.